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Chair: Mr. Shany

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The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 40 of the Covenant (*continued*)

Fourth periodic report of Lithuania (CCPR/C/LTU/4; CCPR/C/LTU/QPR/4)

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Lithuania took places at the Committee table.*

2. **Mr. Germanas** (Lithuania) said that he wished to take the opportunity to reiterate his country's commitment to upholding its national and human rights obligations. The fourth periodic report had been presented to civil society with a view to discussing the most problematic areas in the implementation of the Covenant. During the reporting period, Lithuania had ratified the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance and accepted its individual complaints procedure; acceded to the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment; ratified the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings and the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse; and signed the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (the Istanbul Convention).

3. The Ombudsman's Office attached to the Lithuanian parliament (Seimas) had been accredited as a national human rights institution in accordance with the Paris Principles. It had already assumed a wide range of new responsibilities, including broader monitoring functions, the presentation of reports to international organizations and the implementation of inquiry procedures. It was also actively consulting with civil society on how to improve its work.

4. As part of its implementation of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, on 1 July 2015 Lithuania had established the Department of National Minorities. The Department was mandated to streamline the application of national policies and deepen the Government's engagement with the Roma community. It was closely involved in the discussions on draft legislation concerning national minorities.

5. Lithuania had made additional efforts to uphold the principles of non-discrimination and equal opportunity. Revised provisions of the Labour Code, Law on Employment and Law on Education prohibited all types of harassment and provided for the promotion of equal opportunities. The 2017–2019 Action Plan for Promoting Non-discrimination included measures aimed at improving legal regulations on non-discrimination and promoting tolerance. Responsibility for providing legal representation for victims of criminal offences related to sexual harassment had been assumed by the State.

6. Legislative amendments had recently been adopted to modernize and centralize the child protection system. An inter-agency cooperation agreement had been signed with a view to mounting a rapid, professional response to any potential threats posed to children. A support centre for child victims of sexual abuse had been opened.

7. In order to fully implement the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings, stricter standards had been adopted that had led to a steady increase in pretrial investigations and convictions. Additional measures had been taken to provide better support for victims, ensure compliance with international obligations, allocate resources to non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and provide the necessary training to law enforcement officers.

8. Lithuania had changed the way it addressed the issue of domestic violence. Having signed the Istanbul Convention and launched the process for its ratification, it had been working to bring its laws into line with the provisions of that instrument. A number of ministries and institutions had allocated additional resources and assumed broader responsibilities in the effort to combat violence against women, all of which had enhanced the effectiveness of police investigations and the work of the specialized offices that prosecuted such crimes. Increased support was being provided to victims by specialized assistance centres.

9. The European Union General Data Protection Regulation had entered into force in 2018. In order to transpose the directive into the Lithuanian legal framework, a number of national laws had been amended. The unlawful management of personal data was punishable by fines.

10. Lithuania had made many improvements to its policies on detention and had recently adopted a more effective probation system and allocated additional resources to probation officers. Greater attention had been devoted to non-custodial measures, and both prolonged administrative detention and administrative arrest had been abolished.

11. Although significant progress had been made since the presentation of the country's third periodic report to the Committee, much remained to be done, particularly in the areas of domestic violence, protection of the rights and freedoms of the Roma community and of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons, and assistance to victims of human trafficking. His delegation was convinced that an interactive exchange with the Committee would facilitate the further development of the human rights protection system in Lithuania.

12. **Ms. Cleveland** said that she welcomed the information provided by the delegation, which showed that solid progress had been made since the previous reporting period. However, with respect to paragraph 1 of the list of issues, the Committee was concerned at the State party's failure to provide concrete information on specific measures taken to ensure that national legislation was not interpreted or applied in a discriminatory manner on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity. Equally, it was concerned at the failure of the State party to provide information on measures taken to investigate the complicity of State officials in human rights violations in counter-terrorism operations. What procedures were in place for engaging with the Committee's follow-up process and substantively implementing the Committee's recommendations?

13. In its Views with regard to communication No. 2155/2012 (*Paksas v. Lithuania*), the Committee had requested a revision of the lifelong prohibition of President Paksas's right to be a presidential candidate. Although the State party had indicated in 2014 that it had established an ad hoc commission and working group to review the matter, it had not provided any further information to the Committee. She wished to verify the accuracy of civil society reports that, in a 2016 ruling, the Constitutional Court had stated that the Views had no legal force and that the government representative, Mrs. Karolina Bubnyte, had repeatedly made the same assertion before the Seimas. Inasmuch as the State party had accepted the legal obligation to put the provisions of the Covenant into effect, it also had an obligation to give legal effect to the Views of the Committee.

14. With reference to paragraph 2 of the list of issues, she would appreciate clarification regarding the Government's view of the relationship between rights under the Covenant and the Constitution of Lithuania. She would be interested to know whether constitutional provisions were interpreted in the light of Covenant rights and, if so, why the matters at issue in President Paksas's case had not been resolved on the basis of the Constitution and its interpretation. It was unclear what processes, if any, existed to ensure that proposed amendments to the Constitution were consistent with the State party's international legal obligations.

15. In respect of paragraph 9 of the list of issues, the Committee was concerned about the under-reporting, under-investigation and under-prosecution of hate crimes in the State party. She would appreciate clarification on the statistical information in annex 2 of the report on "registered" crimes under article 170 of the Criminal Code. It would be useful to know whether all crimes that were reported were registered, how many convictions had ensued and what penalties had been handed down in those cases. She would welcome information on the steps being taken by the State party to ensure that hate crimes were properly prosecuted as such, rather than as other types of offences. In addition, she would be grateful if the delegation could supply disaggregated statistics on the number of hate crimes committed against members of vulnerable populations, such as members of ethnic or religious minorities and homosexuals. She would like to know how many criminal cases relating to hate crimes on the Internet had been pursued by cybercrime investigation units and with what results. How often had hate speech been removed from the Internet by the

Inspector of Journalist Ethics? What legal standard was applied to identify hate speech, and was there a process for contesting the removal of content? Information on the steps being taken by the State party to address societal intolerance regarding specific groups would be appreciated.

16. **Ms. Jelić**, referring to paragraph 3 of the list of issues, said that she would welcome information on the composition of the Seimas Ombudsman's Office and the procedure in place for the appointment of its members. It would be useful to obtain further details on the specific areas of action of the Office and the new functions referred to in paragraph 20 of the State party's report. Further information on the relationship between the Seimas Ombudsman's Office and the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson would be welcome. Did the former have any competency with respect to discrimination cases, or were they exclusively the domain of the latter?

17. Regarding the dissemination of the Covenant, she would appreciate further information on how the Government cooperated with civil society organizations in furthering the public awareness initiatives referred to in paragraphs 93 to 95 of its report. She wondered whether the concluding observations of the Committee on the third periodic report of Lithuania had been disseminated through public events and discussions or only on institutional websites. It would be useful to know how many judges had taken part in training sessions dealing with the provisions of the Covenant and the concluding observations and Views of the Committee.

18. It was her understanding that administrative fines ranging from 40 to 1,200 euros could be imposed for breaches of the Law on Equal Opportunities of Women and Men. However, it seemed that, in most cases, the only response was the issuance of a warning by the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson. Academic and civil society reports indicated that the State Labour Inspectorate was reluctant to classify instances of discrimination as a breach of labour laws. She would be grateful if the delegation could elaborate on that assertion. In addition, it would be useful to know how many complaints regarding discrimination in connection with the free movement of workers had been examined by the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson.

19. She would also be interested to know how many total complaints of discrimination had been recorded by the Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson, in addition to the total number of complaints it had ultimately examined. Lastly, it would be useful to learn whether any type of affirmative action had been taken to promote gender equality in the workplace.

20. **Mr. Fathalla** said that he wished to know whether the 2017/20 budget for the National Programme for the Prevention of Domestic Violence and Provision of Assistance to Victims had been finalized. Confirmation of the adoption of a new plan for the implementation of the national strategy for combating violence against women would be welcome. In addition, he would be grateful for clarification on how crisis centres and temporary shelters for victims of domestic violence coordinated their work, as well as further information on their management and the quality of the accommodations they provided. He would be interested to know how the State party addressed sexual harassment in the workplace outside the employer-employee relationship and to learn more about the State party's efforts to raise public awareness of the issue of sexual harassment and to publicize the available means of protection and redress.

21. **Mr. Politi** said that the Committee would be grateful for specific information on any measures taken to improve the social and economic conditions of the Roma community, particularly with regard to education, women's employment, health insurance and housing, under the 2015–2020 iteration of the Action Plan for Roma Integration into Lithuanian Society. He would welcome clarification as to why no statistics were available from the Prosecutor General's Office on criminal complaints involving discrimination unless they resulted in a pretrial investigation. In that regard, it would also be useful to learn whether the statistics provided in the report regarding discrimination against the Roma community covered cases involving violence and intimidation.

22. **Ms. Kran** said that she would be interested to know what sorts of depictions of same-sex relationships, if any, were not censored under the Law on the Protection of

Minors against the Detrimental Effect of Public Information; how often that law had been applied in practice; whether it had ever been used to censor information that was not related to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or intersex persons; and whether the Government planned to amend that statute to ensure non-discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation. She would also welcome confirmation as to whether a positive depiction of relationships between lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons in the media would potentially prompt action by the Office of the Inspector of Journalist Ethics. She also wished to know why the Office's restrictions on freedom of expression in relation to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons were considered necessary and how they could be considered proportionate to the harm that they were thought to cause. It would be interesting to know whether there had been any successful legal challenges to the Office's recommendations on the ground that they were discriminatory and, if not, whether other remedies existed. In the same vein, she would welcome information on any plans to provide greater access to the Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson for people facing discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity. She also wished to know what steps had been taken to increase accountability for hate crimes against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons and whether such crimes constituted a distinct punishable offence.

23. She would be interested to learn what steps the State party had taken to allow same-sex couples to obtain legal recognition of their relationships. An update would be appreciated on the steps taken by the State party to implement the decision of the European Court of Human Rights requiring the establishment of legal measures to regulate gender reassignment. An explanation of the proposed amendment to the Civil Code that would prohibit legal and medical gender reassignment would be welcome, as would information on the extent of access to reassignment surgery in Lithuania. She would appreciate information on any legal measures adopted to facilitate gender reassignment procedures or to simplify the issuance of new identity cards to persons who had undergone such procedures. It would also be useful to know whether persons who wished to change their gender legally were required to have undergone gender reassignment surgery. Lastly, she would be interested to know how the State party's prohibition of gender reassignment surgery for married persons was consistent with anti-discrimination legislation.

24. **The Chair** said that he wished to know how the State party balanced respect for freedom of expression and association with the sentiments of the Russian-speaking minority in Lithuania, given that the latest National Security Threat Assessment had designated movements advocating a change in the country's political orientation as a potential threat to national security.

The meeting was suspended at 4.05 p.m. and resumed at 4.20 p.m.

25. **Mr. Staniulis** (Lithuania) said that the Seimas Ombudsmen's Office had two functions: the first — monitoring the activities of the Government to prevent any abuse of power — was provided for in the Constitution, while the second — examining complaints of human rights violations and promoting respect for human rights throughout the country — was provided for in recent amendments to the legislation regulating the Office's activities.

26. **Ms. Goštautaitė** (Lithuania) said that the Prosecutor General's Office did not compile official statistics. Nevertheless, since 2018, pretrial investigations had been classified according to the article of the Criminal Code and the suspected motive involved in each case, but not by the race, nationality or religion of the alleged victim. Thus far in 2018, nine pretrial investigations into violations of article 170 of the Criminal Code had been initiated, of which five related to nationality, two to race and two to sexual orientation. Three of those investigations had been closed and six were under way. Between 2010 and 2018, around 1,000 pretrial investigations into suspected violations of article 170 had been initiated, of which 253 had gone to trial, resulting in 2,075 individual convictions. Prosecutors could only discontinue pretrial investigations into cases involving hate speech if the Office of the Inspector of Journalist Ethics had concluded that no incitement to hatred had occurred. The termination of pretrial investigations could be challenged by the alleged victim if he or she felt that the prosecutor's decision was unlawful or unreasonable. In

2017, the Government had received funding from the European Union for a two-year inter-institutional project to train police officers how to recognize hate crimes.

27. **Ms. Dulkinaitė** (Lithuania) said that employers with more than 15 staff members were required to publish their internal policies for the implementation of the gender equality provisions of the Labour Code. Between 2015 and 2017, the State Labour Inspectorate had conducted 193 investigations into complaints regarding a lack of gender equality in the workplace. The Government had organized activities to educate people about the gender pay gap as a means of helping to address labour market segregation issues. It had also conducted information campaigns to raise awareness of the provisions of the new Labour Code and had supported women's advocacy groups.

28. The Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson conducted independent investigations and surveys concerning discrimination on the basis of sex and sexual harassment and made policy recommendations to the Government. In 2017, it had received 312 complaints of discrimination on the basis of sex, 98 complaints of discrimination on the basis of age and 83 complaints of discrimination on the basis of disability, most of which had been related to situations in the workplace.

29. The 2017–2019 Action Plan for Promoting Non-discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons was being implemented by various institutions and NGOs. The Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson was organizing seminars, meetings and training courses on issues relating to the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons; the Police Department also arranged for courses for its officers on such issues. In addition, research was being conducted on such persons' status in society and on the protection afforded to them in public and private life.

30. In 2017 the Office of the Ombudsperson had launched a three-year project with financing from a European Union structural fund that focused on combating discrimination in the labour market by raising awareness of human rights in the business community, the public sector and society at large. Awareness-raising distance learning courses would also be organized and guidelines for business equality plans were to be issued.

31. The European Commission had provided funds in late 2017 for another awareness-raising project on the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons. The Lithuanian Gay League was a leading partner in the project, which focused on increasing public acceptance of that community and highlighting the legal difficulties that its members faced.

32. **Mr. Milevičius** (Lithuania) said that in 2017 a budget of €827,000 had been allocated for the implementation of the National Programme for the Prevention of Domestic Violence and Provision of Assistance to Victims. The corresponding budget for 2018 was €865,000, and the budgets for the following two years would be even larger.

33. The functions performed by crisis centres and shelters overlapped to some extent, but the crisis centres mainly focused on intensive, short-term assistance, while the shelters offered longer-term accommodation. Crisis centres and shelters in smaller municipalities were financed by the local authorities, while cities such as Vilnius and Kaunas also had a number of facilities run by NGOs. As many of the crisis centres had been set up with the help of European Union funds, they were required to operate in accordance with European Union standards.

34. **Ms. Goštautaitė** (Lithuania) said that sexual harassment was a punishable offence when committed in other situations as well, not just in the workplace. The Criminal Code also prohibited, for example, the sexual harassment of persons who relied on public social services.

35. **Ms. Montvydaitė** (Lithuania) said that the Department of National Minorities had been re-established in 2015 in order to promote tolerance throughout society and the integration of all minorities. It served as a bridge between cultures, language groups and communities. The Department organized training seminars for journalists and other members of the mass media as a means of combating hate speech. It supported and funded cultural activities on behalf of Roma, Muslim and other groups. International Roma Day was celebrated each year on 8 April and, in 2015, the Seimas had decided to celebrate

National Community Day each year on 22 May. The country's leaders were also involved each year in celebrating the International Day for Tolerance on 16 November.

36. Integration and other measures taken on behalf of the Roma community had produced impressive results. That community was composed of just over 2,000 people, most of whom lived in Vilnius. As more than 50 per cent of the members of the Roma community were under 20 years of age, public support focused on providing access to education and the labour market. A network of teachers had been set up to engage in social work with the community. It was estimated that there were more than 460 Roma children in the country's schools, but the statistics were somewhat inaccurate because their origins were not always identifiable. A large group of Roma women were enrolled in vocational training courses funded by the European Union.

37. The number of Roma living in a camp in Vilnius had declined over the past 10 years from about 500 to 240; the municipal government of Vilnius ran a housing programme for Roma that provided rental subsidies. Social workers assisted members of the Roma community to find employment. Health insurance coverage for the Roma community had been just 76 per cent in 2011 but had increased to 89 per cent by 2015, compared to 91 per cent for the population as a whole.

38. **Ms. Milašiūtė** (Lithuania) said that it had admittedly taken her country some time to execute the judgment of the European Court of Human Rights in the *L. v. Lithuania* case. However, since 2017, persons who had not yet undergone permanent gender reassignment surgery could still obtain official documents on which their chosen gender identity was represented. According to a landmark domestic court ruling in May 2017, gender reassignment should be understood more broadly as an individual's psychological self-identification with a particular gender, as evidenced by the person's medical data and social behaviour. Similar rulings had subsequently been handed down in more than 10 cases.

39. As legislative amendments were deemed to be necessary in order to comply with the judgment of the European Court of Human Rights, in 2017 the Minister of Justice and the Minister of Health had been instructed to draw up the necessary legislation in order to fill in the existing gaps in the law and ensure that transgender persons could obtain necessary medical treatments. The two basic requirements were to ensure legal recognition of gender reassignment and to ensure access to medical treatment for persons requesting reassignment. A bill drafted by a high-level working group had been submitted to ministries, ombudspersons and the Association of Municipalities for their consideration. Expert advice had been sought from the Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI) Unit of the Council of Europe, and the Transgender Europe Network had submitted comments and proposals. Given the widely divergent views on the issue held by members of the legislature, a conference of representatives of the Ministry of Justice, the parliamentary Human Rights Committee and the SOGI Unit was to be held in September 2018, prior to the autumn session of the Seimas, to prepare the ground for the submission of the bill.

40. Some progress had also been made in the area of medical treatment. Transgender persons currently had access to psychiatric assistance, hormone treatment and certain types of plastic surgery, and there was a legal avenue for seeking compensation for the cost of certain medical treatments even though they were not included in the national health coverage scheme. As the work done to date on draft legislation had been based on the International Classification of Diseases, some of those texts might have to be reworked in view of the recent adoption by the World Health Organization (WHO) of a new version which coded transsexualism differently.

41. A high-level meeting had been held a few days previously at the Seimas Ombudsman's Office with the Minister of Justice and the Minister of Health to assess action taken in response to the *L. v. Lithuania* case. Both Ministers were determined to take effective action to ensure protection for transgender persons. It was hoped that the requisite political support would be obtained at the parliamentary meeting scheduled for September 2018.

42. **Mr. Stankevičius** (Lithuania) said that the Office of the Inspector of Journalist Ethics oversaw compliance with the Law on the Protection of Minors against the

Detrimental Effect of Public Information. That law contained an exhaustive list of the categories of information that it covered, including gruesome violence and incitement to hatred, and was enforced in line with the principles of necessity and proportionality. It had actually been enforced on only two occasions, most recently in 2014. Two proposals to amend the statute had been submitted to the Seimas.

47. **Ms. Goštautaitė** (Lithuania), referring to paragraph No. 12 of the list of issues, drew attention to paragraphs 99 to 102 of the report, which dealt with the steps taken to investigate the possible unlawful transportation of persons across the national border and their detention by the Central Intelligence Agency of the United States on Lithuanian territory. As noted in paragraph 102, in February 2015 the prosecution service had decided to combine the two pretrial investigations being conducted in connection with the suspected offences in order to move forward more quickly. Vigorous action had been taken to disclose the crimes and identify the guilty parties, but no objective evidence had been found. Accordingly, no active investigative activities were currently being conducted, although the investigation had not been terminated. To some extent, the current status of the investigations had to do with the fact that no response had been received to requests for legal assistance from other countries.

44. **Ms. Milašiūtė** (Lithuania) said that cooperation with NGOs and civil society was generally encouraged in the course of the legislative process, especially in connection with the implementation of United Nations treaty body recommendations. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs was responsible for overall coordination, but the Ministry of Justice coordinated action relating to the universal periodic review procedure. Annual meetings were held with representatives of ministries, parliamentary committees, ombudspersons and civil society on the implementation of universal periodic review and treaty body recommendations, and NGOs were encouraged to engage in the dialogue. Line ministries were also urged to hold meetings with NGOs on the implementation of specific recommendations.

45. **Mr. Germanas** (Lithuania) said that the State Security Department was required to submit assessments of threats to national security. Those assessments were not directed against specific groups of people but instead focused on persons who could negatively influence certain types of political and social processes in Lithuania.

46. **Ms. Cleveland** said that, as she had noted earlier, she would welcome more detailed information on the steps taken by the State party to implement the Committee's Views. She would also welcome information on the penalties that had been imposed on persons who had committed hate crimes. In particular, she wondered whether aggravating circumstances had ever been applied in a case involving a crime motivated by a person's sexual orientation.

47. It would be interesting to learn, as she had stated in her first round of questions, what legal standard was used to identify speech as actionable hate speech or hate speech that should be removed from the Internet. She would appreciate a comment on reports that the annual list of national security threats was used to suppress discussions of Lithuanian complicity in Nazi crimes during the Second World War. More specifically, she would like the delegation to address claims that one particular person had been included on the list for no reason other than that he had stated that Lithuania had been anti-Semitic even before the War and that the provisional Government of 1941 and its paramilitary battalions had contributed to the Holocaust. Comments on reports that the Seimas was considering a government-sponsored bill that would ban the sale of material that distorted historical fact would also be appreciated.

48. She would welcome an update on the status of the bill that would restrict access to abortion in some cases and on a number of legislative initiatives that would limit the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons. She noted that few perpetrators of domestic violence were convicted, and she would therefore appreciate it if the delegation would comment on reports that efforts to combat domestic violence were not as energetic as they might be. It would be interesting to know whether the State party had plans to criminalize marital rape.

49. **Mr. Politi** said that it would be useful to have a table indicating progress towards specific goals connected with the elimination of discrimination against members of the

Roma community. He wondered whether the authorities had any statistics on early marriage among Roma and whether any action had been taken to raise awareness of the problems posed by that custom.

50. **Mr. Fathalla** asked whether he had understood correctly that sexual harassment in the workplace was a crime only when the victim was hierarchically subordinate to the perpetrator.

51. **Mr. Staniulis** (Lithuania) said that Lithuania had no legally defined process for giving effect to the recommendations made by treaty bodies or the Committee's Views. Nonetheless, the recommendations were distributed to the relevant ministries for further action, and they informed the decisions that were ultimately made on relevant matters. In some cases, they were explicitly referred to when the rationale for those decisions was being explained.

52. **Ms. Milašiūtė** (Lithuania) said that, under Lithuanian law, the legal status of the Committee's Views was identical to that of the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights. In addition, the government official responsible for articulating the Government's response to the Court's judgments was also responsible for coordinating the Government's efforts to give effect to the Committee's Views. There was a clear basis under domestic law for awarding any necessary compensation. The Committee's Views also provided sufficient grounds for reopening, as appropriate, criminal proceedings that had been brought to a close.

53. It should not be surprising that it was taking so long to give effect to the Views adopted by the Committee in *Paksas v. Lithuania*, a controversial case in which the Committee had requested Lithuania to revise the lifelong prohibition which barred the complainant, a former president of the country, from standing in presidential elections or serving as prime minister or as a cabinet minister. A bill that would change the ban for life to a 10-year ban had been discussed in the first parliamentary session of 2018, and that bill was now ready to be submitted to the full legislature when it met again later in the year.

54. **Ms. Montvydaitė** (Lithuania) said that she would try to find an English-language version of the progress indicators that had been requested by the Committee. Early marriages in the Roma community were rarely officiated by public servants. In fact, Roma families were often reluctant to inform the State of the child marriages that took place in their communities. In Lithuania, unlike in some other countries, members of the Roma community typically stated that early marriage was part of their cultural tradition, and efforts made by the authorities to try to put a stop to early marriage were unwelcome.

55. An oblique approach to the issue was therefore taken. For instance, empowerment activities for women were organized, and efforts were made to help them enter the labour market. An association of Roma women from the Baltic region had been established at an international meeting organized by the Government in 2017, and the majority of the persons working as mediators between Roma and other communities or State institutions were Roma women. They participated in international activities, including those organized as part of the European Platform for Roma Inclusion, and were leaning English. Considerable work was still to be done, however, not least to combat stereotypes about Roma. In that regard, it was necessary to work with society as a whole, not just the Roma community.

56. **Mr. Germanas** (Lithuania) said that the Holocaust was a subject of study in the country's schools. A frank discussion of all such issues was possible; there were no prohibitions in that regard. More than 800 Lithuanians had been given the Righteous among the Nations honorific by Yad Vashem, the Israeli Holocaust remembrance authority, for their efforts to save Jews during the Second World War. The Government commemorated those Lithuanians and their courage each year.

57. **Ms. Goštautaitė** (Lithuania) said that the results of the authorities' focus on domestic violence were clearly visible. Every year, for example, there were some 10,000 investigations into suspected cases of domestic violence. In addition, the number of cases that had led to trials had increased every year since 2015, reaching more than 2,000 in the first half of 2018. Marital rape was punishable in the same way as any other rape.

58. The Prosecutor General's Office did not have any specific statistics on the number of cases in which the punishment for a crime had been stiffened because the perpetrator had been motivated by hatred of a particular category of persons. Speech that incited hatred of a given group was considered hate speech. Calls to disseminate degrading comments were also considered hate speech. The Office of the Inspector of Journalist Ethics was responsible for scrutinizing the media for signs of incitement to hatred.

59. **Mr. Stankevičius** (Lithuania), responding to earlier questions regarding the submission of bills in the legislature concerning such issues as the prohibition of abortion and restrictions on the rights and freedoms of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons, said that the country's lawmakers were entitled to propose bills or other legislative initiatives as they saw fit. None of the proposals about which Committee members had expressed concern had been adopted. In fact, many of them had not even been discussed in committee but had simply been registered.

60. **Ms. Kran** said that she wondered whether the legislative proposal that would afford same-sex couples the right to have their relationships formally recognized had progressed beyond the registration stage. She also wondered whether the decisions made by the Office of the Inspector of Journalist Ethics could be challenged and what steps were taken to ensure that those decisions were necessary and proportionate.

61. **Ms. Cleveland** said that she wished to know what stage the bills that would restrict access to abortion and limit criticism of the nation had reached in the parliamentary process. She would welcome information on the State party's efforts to combat discrimination against persons with disabilities. It would be interesting to learn, for instance, what steps it had taken to ensure that such persons had access to public buildings, transport and sexual and reproductive health services, including contraception and confidential treatment of sexually transmitted diseases.

62. **Ms. Jelić** said that she would like to know what measures the State party was adopting, in the absence of a specific legal framework, to enable its national minorities to preserve their linguistic identity and exercise their right to use their own language. In the same connection, she wondered what had been done to ensure that a high-quality education was offered in the State party's minority-language schools. She also wished to know whether progress had been made towards drafting, in consultation with members of the Roma community, a comprehensive strategy for combating discrimination against Roma in all spheres of public life. Lastly, she wished to know whether the law prohibiting employers from discriminating against women — by paying them less, for example — applied to employers in both the public and private sectors or only to those in the public sector.

63. **Ms. Montvydaitė** (Lithuania) said that all action plans and other projects concerning the Roma community were developed and implemented in close consultation with Roma non-governmental organizations and other community representatives. Four proposals for a national minorities law had been put forward. There was no legislative void in that regard, however, as the rights of national minorities were recognized in a number of specific laws. Their rights in connection with education, for instance, were recognized in the Law on Education.

64. The total number of schools in Lithuania had been halved since the country had regained its independence, but the number of Polish-language schools had remained the same. Lithuania had a larger Polish-language education system than any other country in the world outside Poland. Municipalities in the regions inhabited by national minorities offered public services in the minority language as well as in Lithuanian.

65. **Mr. Germanas** (Lithuania) said that discussions with the country's Polish minority and with the Government of Poland on the rights of Polish speakers in Lithuania had been very productive.

66. **Ms. Dulkinaitė** (Lithuania) said that the requirements put in place to promote equal pay for equal work applied to both the public and private sectors. Employers in both sectors also had to have equality plans and could be required to publish wage information broken down by gender. Efforts to narrow the gender pay gap would be facilitated by the provision of appropriate training in both public and private institutions.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.